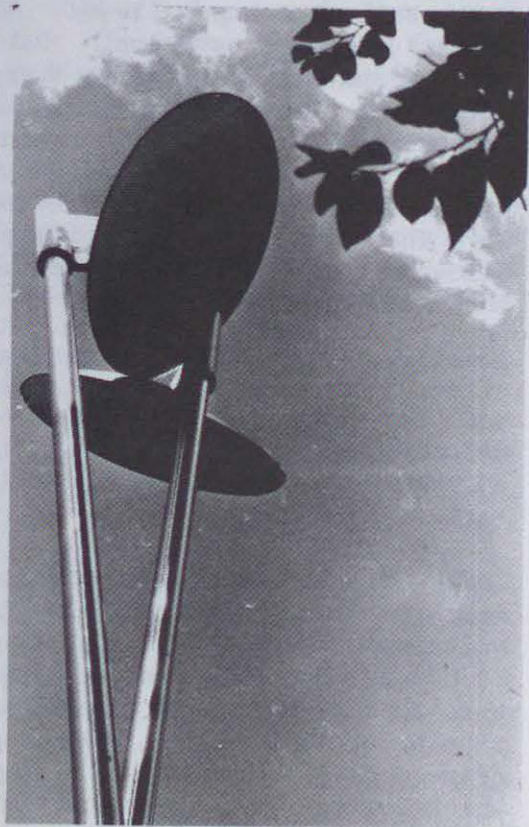


Bridging Water & Time



Skirting silently, high above the swift flowing waters of the LeMoyne Channel, the blue and white Minirail cars were a charming and familiar sight. Cosmos Walk, the link between the Islands of Expo 67, summoned the visitor to journey into a fantastic new realm of strange forms, textures and spaces. It led to Ile Notre-Dame, the jewel of Expo. A man-made island, of distinctly urban character, whose Pavilions were fringed by a network of bridges and canals, a miracle of hydraulics and engineering, moulded out of a few acres of rocks.

Orest Humennyj

The magnitude of the accomplishment, virtually unparalleled in recent history, was not restricted to Ile Notre-Dame. Expo 67 had been an entirely new Canadian experience, the most difficult problem of design, scheduling and construction ever undertaken in this country. It proved the capacity of Canadians to conceive and manage a bold international undertaking of the highest proportions. Our architects, builders, designers and engineers proved themselves, their excellence and dedication, before the world.

Expo 67's success was spectacular. During its six month duration, Expo attracted a daily average of 265,000 visitors to its site. Over 50,000,000 people in all, from every corner of the globe passed through its turnstiles. In a richly human context, sensitive yet rational, people and ideas revealed affinities hidden beneath external differences. Visitors were overwhelmed by the spirit of Expo. Entire crowds fell under a spell created by an atmosphere of new people, new sensations and new ideas which delighted and enriched those present.

*If you hold on to my hand
You'll step into a dream
Onto a magic island
Like a painted summer scene*

The dream was real. The words of the Expo 67 theme song were true. Man had created an environment which cast a magical spell. Expo became a meeting place, a focal point for the highest levels of creative thought.

In an exhibition such as Expo 67, where the principal objective of every individual pavilion is to attract more attention than the building next door, a considerable architectural diversity is not only expected, but is in fact desirable. However, too great a range of expression invites the creation of a chaotic, even vulgar result. It is here that Expo's triumph was greatest; in the totality which was created, the highly ordered visual world, enhanced by many diverse, often exceptional buildings.

Such a high degree of environmental unity was the result of a subtle, varied and unobtrusive master plan, based on a uniformity and hierarchy of ideas.

The transport system, which was the backbone of the plan, created a strong linear pattern defining the focal points of Theme Pavilions, while distributing the major national exhibits along the islands' peripheries. Indi-

vidual buildings, whose prevailing design intent called for them to be temporary, composed of light prefabricated elements or mass-produced assemblies, possessed essentially general characteristics. The admirable and consistent coordination of every incidental detail throughout the site, in particular furniture, lighting and graphics, all designed to exceptionally high standards, was a major achievement. Water, an unparalleled unifying element, was everywhere. Pavilions were flanked by fountains, fringed by lakes and canals, and surrounded by the river. Finally the crowds, on certain days exceeding 570,000 people, produced an unending visual continuity. The site, geared to pedestrians, allowed the visitors to rediscover their own dignity.

Sensitive planning and coordination, directed by people with imagination and foresight, resulted in an exhibition of such character and beauty that thousands came simply to walk and look.

Today Ile Sainte-Hélène survives almost in its entirety. The site and buildings, designed to accommodate 30,000,000 visitors over a period of six months, have now greeted well in excess of 100,000,000 within a time frame spanning 13 years. Line-ups, which during Expo signalled frequent waits of up to three hours, are nonexistent. The beauty of the site, which was a determining influence on the success of Expo, enhanced by mature vegetation is no less spectacular. The magic is gone.

Ile Notre-Dame did not fare as well.

Crossing the LeMoynes Channel today lacks the charm and thrill of anticipation that characterized the Cosmos Walk in those early years. The Mini-rail, the playful translucent globes, the wood decking and the bridge's open central gap are mere memories. Totally rebuilt before the 1976 Olympic Games, Cosmos Walk has no character, no tex-

ture. Its open sweep of asphalt emphasizes the necessity and the chore of crossing the river rather than the former pleasure.

One's arrival at Île Notre-Dame is unheralded, the polarity and tension of the 1967 American - Soviet axis has given way to a non-descript scene. The empty hulk of the Olympic Rowing Basin whose construction necessitated the demolition of almost twenty buildings, stands silent and unused. The track built for the Grand Prix du Canada, which claimed numerous other victims, including the landmark of Île Notre-Dame - the Katimavik, can be seen in the distance. This bland sight is secondary, however, to the emotions surely triggered within any Expo lover who for the first time since 1971, when Île Notre-Dame did not reopen, is, as a result of the Floralties 1980, given the opportunity to re-explore this magnificent island.

The devastation on the eastern half of Île Notre-Dame is virtually total. Only four pavilions, out of an original thirty, survive in their entirety. The former Tunisian Pavilion, a classic example of traditional refinement, stands alone, deprived of the geographical ensemble which constituted its neighbours. The building which once seemed to float in air, due to its surrounding moat floored with blue



mosaics, now houses the press corps covering the Floralties 1980.

Progressing westward, admiring the floral exhibits which sprawl over the interred foundations of the Moroccan, Ethiopian, Venezuelan, Czechoslovakian and Italian Pavilions, one's eyes are constantly drawn to the still waters of the canals to the south. Their banks are concealed beneath the unrestrained growth of grass, bushes and now mature trees which threaten to subdue the site. Standing alone, or in clusters, the elegant disc shaped light reflectors mounted on poles, reflecting the beams of light projected up at them from luminescent cylinders, are still strung out along the canals. They are neglected though, their inclining silhouettes are etched sadly against the sky.

Among the most desolate and moving sights to be encountered on Île Notre-Dame, is the peculiar octagonal remnant of the Canadian National Pavilion. This structure is the 200 seat motion picture theater which was once linked to a cluster of nine colourful, translucent gemlike cells. Its theme of "Time and Motion" seems ironically appropriate.

In the immediate vicinity, the three other surviving pavilions are dispersed. The Canadian Kodak Pavilion, painted in rather garish colours, is virtually hidden behind a dense blanket of vegetation. The Economic Progress Pavilion, stripped of its forty foot aluminum pylons, is only a vestige of its former self. The European Communities Pavilion, though slightly tarnished, has lost little impact. Its ultra-modern shape covered in steel-blue panels is as striking and dynamic as it was during Expo 67. Unfortunately, all three buildings stand empty and ignored.

The "Man the Producer" Theme Pavilion, a large cumbersome building, has been partially demolished. However, a series of terraces has been retained.

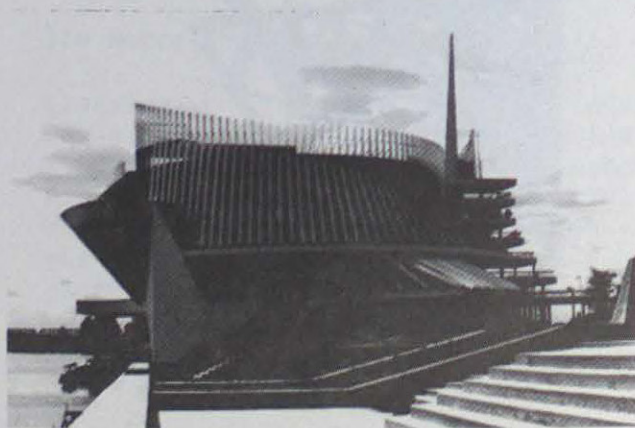


Formed from the structure's brutal pre-rusted tetrahedral space frame, they create a fascinating walk-through sculpture. From these decks one can view the barren site of the German Pavilion. Frei Otto's daring tensile structure was considered by many to be the highlight, the most original showing of Expo 67. Nearby stood the Australian Pavilion, whose deep, cushioned talking armchairs entertained over 14,000,000 sitters.

The western half of Ile Notre-Dame has weathered time and development more successfully. Its urban character, however, has been destroyed. The high density of surface construction was at one time contrasted against the clearly defined boundaries of Parc Notre-Dame. Today that distinction can no longer be made. The floral exhibits meld into the parkland. The parkland in turn has been maimed and drastically reduced in size, through the con-

struction of the Olympic Rowing Basin and the Grand Prix du Canada track. The surviving large pavilions, which once fringed a central core of small buildings, are today shockingly out of scale. Deprived of their modest neighbours, these pavilions are irrational monoliths.

The British Pavilion, a sprawling windowless building, is in poor condition. Time, neglect and vandalism have taken their toll. The damage, however, is superficial. The infamous pavilion which housed the hostesses with the shortest skirts at Expo 67, is the only one on this part of the island closed to the public. The French Pavilion next door, a powerful structure of concrete and steel, wrapped in a row of shimmering aluminum sunbreaker strips, is in excellent state. A solitary group of water damaged acoustic ceiling panels testify to the lack of maintenance. The small number of

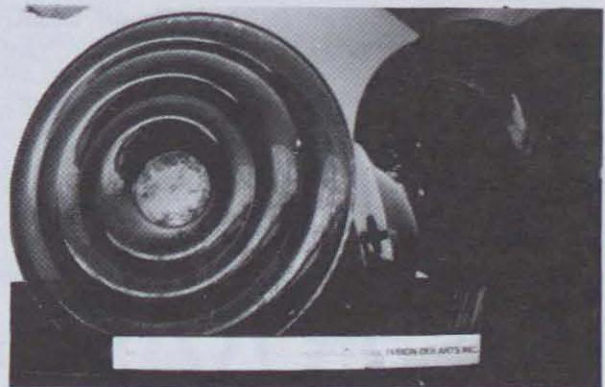


Floralies 1980 exhibitors housed within its walls appear futile and insignificant in a building designed to accommodate a 210,000 square foot display.

This ensemble of buildings is capped off by the Quebec Pavilion. An elegant classical structure sheathed in tinted glass and girded by water, its beauty has not been marred by the passage of time. Coolly aloof by day, warm and extroverted by night, it leads the visitor along its ramps through a charming and witty tour of Quebec. The Ontario Pavilion, Quebec's immediate neighbour which was destroyed by fire in the early Seventies, is gravely missed. Its sparsely landscaped site seems rather tame in comparison to the jagged roofline and random mass of 1320 granite blocks which once dominated it.

Five other pavilions have survived the developments of the past thirteen years. All are in superb condition, with the sole exception of the United Nations Pavilion. Denuded by the removal of the majority of its surrounding flagpoles, it serves as an ice-cream stall. Plastered beneath a vulgar display of commercial posters, it is a blatant violation of the graphics policy which contributed so greatly to Expo's visual totality. The four other surviving pavilions are those of Jamaica, Christianity, Indians of Canada, and the Canadian Pavilion's Arts Center.

The greatest individual loss on Île Notre-Dame is that of the Canadian Pavilion. The largest and most expensive national participation at Expo, it covered 11.5 acres at the island's western edge. The Katimavik, a great inverted pyramid, served as Île Notre-Dame's terminal focal point. Demolished in 1978 to make way for the Grand Prix du Canada, the only visible reminders of the Canadian Pavilion's existence are provided by its bandshell and by the gigantic BC fir flagpole below which an everpresent Mountie



Fusion of the Arts • kinetic sculpture

surveilled the scene from atop a glossy steed.

The memories are precious and easily rekindled. The sight of something that one once knew and enjoyed, but not thought about for over a decade, is prone to bring on both sadness and delight. Anybody, for instance, who remembers the "Fusion of the Arts" kinetic sculpture outside the Arts Center on Île Notre-Dame, cannot help but be touched by emotion upon encountering it accidentally. An exercise in sheer craziness, it was a sculpture combining motion, sound and light. A colourful series of large plastic discs rotated, making funny sounds. Today they are covered with dirt, their mechanism is rusted and idle; the discs don't move.